

The Relation of Covenanters to the United States Government

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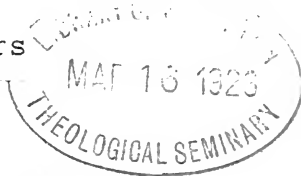
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to the United States



THE RELATION OF COVENANTERS

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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT.

BY REV. C. D. TRUMBULL, D. D.,

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This subject takes for granted that Covenanters sustain a different relation to the government of the United States from that which is sustained by other religious bodies around us. This is indeed the fact. Other bodies of Christians identify with the government by taking part in all political matters, while we, who are Covenanters, take the position of dissent; we do not vote in political elections; we do not seek nor accept political offices; we do not identify with the United States government in any way. We hold that to do these things is to say the least inconsistent with the Christian profession; many among us go even farther and say, it is positively sinful.

Why is it that Covenanters take this position? Every member of the church ought to be able to answer this question. We cannot afford to be ignorant on this subject. Men who float with the tide of current opinion may be ignorant, but those who stand for principle in opposition to the multitudes around them must be able to give a reason for the position they occupy. Before giving the reasons for our dissent from the United States government, we would remove a false impression which rests in the minds of some, hence we remark that

Covenanters are not anti-government men. We believe in civil government, that it is an ordinance of God and founded in the very nature of man; that men whose lots are cast in a territory where no government exists should organize a civil government, establishing such an authority as may best tend to preserve order, liberty and religion among them; and that it is lawful for them to model their constitutions of government in such a manner as may appear most suitable to them; provided, such constitutions in their principles and distribution of power be in nothing contrary to the Divine law." (See Testimony, Chap. xxix, Sec. 2.)

We hold, moreover, that all persons under the jurisdiction of any government should obey all righteous laws. The government may be heathen or infidel, yet if obedience involves no immorality it should be rendered. (See Testimony, Chap. xxix, Sec. 6, and Chap. xxx, Sec. 2. Also, 1 Pet. 2: 13.)

We consider it our duty to support the government by the payment of taxes. We enjoy the protection of the government and many privileges; the payment of taxes is only rendering a just return. The rightfulness of this payment is implied, if not directly taught in our Testimony, Chap. xxx, Sec. 3.

We hold it to be our duty to pray for the government, for its peace and prosperity, and to this end, we do not cease to pray for its reformation. Jeremiah commanded the captive Jews to pray for the peace of the city, Babylon, that in its peace they might have peace. (29: 7.) In Paul's first letter to Timothy he exhorts that "first of all supplications, prayers, intercession and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." (2: 1, 2.) Some one may say, the Covenanters in Scotland refused to pray for their rulers. Yes, they refused to pray for them *as rulers*, when they had broken their covenant with God and with the people, and had by tyranny and oppression forfeited, as they believed, their right to rule, yet they were willing to pray for them as men.

We believe it right to fight for our country, in any lawful war, where no immoral condition stands in the way. Thus it will be seen, we are not anti-government men, yet *we refuse to identify ourselves with the government of the United States* for reasons which seem to be good and sufficient.

Reason 1. Because there is no acknowledgment of God as the source of all civil authority or of the Lord Jesus Christ as Mediatorial King in the fundamental law of the land. The law referred to is the Constitution. That document may be read from beginning to end without so much as learning that there is a God. The fact of the non-recognition of Jehovah is one which has long been lamented by godly men. In a sermon preached in September, 1792, Dr. John M. Mason said: "While many on various pretences have criminated the Federal Constitution, one objection has urged itself forcibly on the pious mind: That no notice whatever should be taken of that God who planteth a nation and plucketh it up at his pleasure is an omission which no pretext whatever can palliate. Had such a momentous business been transacted by Mohammedans, they would have begun, 'In the name of God.' Even the savages whom we despise, setting a better example, would have paid some homage to the Great Spirit. But from the Constitution of the United States, it is impossible to ascertain what God we worship, or

whether we own a God at all." Timothy Dwight, then president of Yale College, said, in the year 1812: "We formed our Constitution without any acknowledgment of God, without any recognition of his mercies to us as a people, of his government, or even of his existence. The convention by which it was formed, never asked, even once, his direction or his blessing on their labors. Thus we commenced our national existence under the present system without God." This state of things thus lamented by Dr. Mason, President Dwight and many others (see *Christian Statesman* Tract, "Testimonies to the Religious Defects of the Constitution") still continues.

Not only is the nation guilty in its neglect to acknowledge God, but it is especially guilty in its failure to acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as the Mediatorial King. No doctrine is more clearly taught in the Scriptures than the doctrine of the Mediatorial dominion of Christ over the nations. The reader is referred to Ps. 22:28, Isa., 9:6., Dan. 5:14., Matt. 28:18., Eph. 1:22, I. Cor. 15:27, and parallel texts. This dominion of Christ must be Mediatorial for it is "given" to him. In his essential character He is God equal with the Father and receives nothing from Him. Moreover, all rightful authority is from Him. By him kings reign and princes decree justice. Prov. 8:15. Once more, civil rulers are required to acknowledge him and judgments are pronounced and will be executed on those who do not recognize and serve him. (See Psalm 2, Ps. 9:17, *et al.*)

The government of the United States has systematically ignored the the Lord Jesus Christ as Mediatorial King and has refused to acknowledge him in its constitution and in other official documents in which such recognition should be made.

Our position has ever been, that it is inconsistent with the Christian profession, yes, sinful to profess allegiance to a constitution of a government which is in hostility to Christ, the Head of the Church and the Prince of the kings of the earth. Since, then, there is no recognition of our God and King in the fundamental law of this nation, and since we are assured in the word of God that those who are not for Christ are against him, we refuse to identify ourselves with the government of the United States as being against Christ.

Some will say "that cannot be made good; our government is for God and Christ; our president calls us annually to observe a day of thanksgiving; there are chaplains appointed in Congress, for the army and the navy; we have many religious usages, we are a Christian nation." We may admit all this and still contend that our government is not Christian and is not such as a Christian people should be identified with.

For about thirty years the nation has been called annually by the chief executive to observe a day of thanksgiving, yet not once in all

that time have the people been called to approach God in the name of Christ, through whom alone we can hope to find acceptance.

The majority of all the people in the land may be Christian, their influence may be, indeed is predominating. Hence our days of thanksgiving, prayers in Congress, etc., yet I affirm that *the government is not Christian*. How can a government be called Christian which persistently ignores the Lord Jesus Christ? How can a government which persistently tramples under foot the law of Christ be called Christian? This brings me to another reason for refusing to identify ourselves with the United States government.

Reason 2. Because the government of the United States tramples under foot the law of God. Here I make specifications:

First. The law of God is trampled under foot by the government when the "Constitution and the laws of the United States which shall be made in pursuance thereof; and all treaties made, or which shall be made, under the authority of the United States," are declared to be "the supreme law of the land." (See Constitution, Article VI.) There is not a word in the Constitution recognizing in any way the binding obligations of the law of God as resting on the government or any of its officers, and rarely is the law of God appealed to by legislators or judges as of any binding authority. Covenanters hold that the Word of God is the supreme law for all men, and refuse to identify themselves with any association, civil, or social, that does not recognize the supremacy of the law of our God.

Second. The Constitution sets aside the test which God has laid down as a qualification for office. The words are: "No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States." (Article VI.) What does this mean? All agree that it forbids discrimination against any because of religious opinions. If this were all we would not seriously object, but practically it bars any objection to any man though he be an infidel or an atheist. It is true the Christian sentiment may so far prevail in many communities that such might fail of election, but being elected there is no constitutional barrier to their inauguration in the highest and most responsible trusts. What is this but to set aside the law of God which lays down as one important qualification of civil officers that they are to be fearers of God? (Ex. 18: 21.; Sam 23: 3.)

Third. The law of God is trampled under foot by the United States government in its sanction of the liquor traffic. No man can legally manufacture or deal in intoxicating drinks in the United States without a permit from the government. In 1883, 206,970 liquor dealers and manufacturers held such permits. Again every original package of liquor, whether barrel or keg, bottle or demijohn, must have a United States revenue stamp affixed. When these conditions are complied with, there is no barrier in the way, so far as the government is

concerned, to the traffic in intoxicants. What is this but to sanction the traffic? We take for granted that the traffic is unholy. We hold that every one who identifies himself with the government is implicated in the sin of this traffic. Covenanters desire to wash their hands of all complicity with this unholy traffic. Hence they refuse to become part and parcel with the United States government.

Fourth. The government tramples under foot the law of God with reference to Sabbath observance. There is a vast amount of Sabbath desecration in the land, openly practised by individuals and public corporations, for which the government is indirectly, if not directly, responsible, but we speak particularly of governmental acts. The Post office department, under the immediate control of the United States government, is a constant violator of the Sabbath. Mails are required to be carried on a large number of routes and post-masters are required to keep offices open in all of the principal towns. Wilbur F. Crafts, who has made this matter a subject of careful inquiry, states that "only a few (post offices) do not open, and these in very small towns, many, if not most of them, off the line of the railroad." There are tens of thousands of men employed every Lord's day in carrying and distributing mails in this land. The government is responsible for this wholesale desecration of the Sabbath, and we hold that every one who identifies himself with the government is a partaker of the guilt. This is only one form of Sabbath desecration by the government; there are others which we deplore. Army regulations require reviews of soldiers every Sabbath day, and more than once Congress has continued its sessions over the Sabbath. We know of no way of washing our hands of all complicity in these sins but by standing aloof from identification with the government and lifting up our voice of testimony against because of these sins.

In closing this discussion I shall endeavor to answer some objections to our position:

Objection 1. "The Christian has no right to withdraw from active co-operation with the government, but is in duty bound to vote for good men for officers, and if he is chosen to office he is bound to accept and administer it on Christian principles." We answer that under a government constituted and administered in accordance with the law of God, it is the duty of Christian citizens to do all this, but that no Christian is bound to identify himself with a government which is Godless and Christless in its organization and that in its laws and administration sets aside the law of God. Were it not for such barriers as these put in our way at the very threshold—we would be quite ready to participate in governmental affairs. We say then to the objector, 'you have put barriers in our way, you require us to comply with sinful conditions before we can vote or hold office; our consciences do not permit us to do this, hence as conscientious Christians we must stand aloof from the government until these barriers are removed.

Objection 2. "You Covenanters are doing nothing to reform the government; if you would vote for good men, you might have more influence in bringing about the reformation you desire." If the objection were true, that we are doing nothing, the same answer might be given as to the preceding; but it is not true. We are doing that which is far more difficult for most of us to do than to go to the polls and vote. It is easy to go with the multitude, but for a few individuals to stand aloof and to testify against the multitude is not so easy. The course we pursue is not only more difficult but it is more effective than the course the objector would have us take. So soon as men identify with an association and bind themselves to its constitution and laws their protest against the evils which may exist in that association, loses its power. There are some men who protest against secret associations; does any one imagine they would have more influence if they would unite with such associations and then try to reform them from within? We protest against running of trains on the Sabbath; what becomes of our protest when we buy stock and perhaps become directors, in such railroad companies? In these cases the effective protest is from without; so to make our protest effective against the immoralities of the government, we must needs stand aloof from participation in governmental affairs. The word of Christ says concerning the two witnesses, not that they overcame by ballots, but "they overcame by the blood of the Lamb and *by the word of their testimony.*"

Objection 3. "If all Christians would do as you, the government will never be reformed." We answer our trust is in God. He has the means of reforming the government in his own hands, and he can and will accomplish the end in his own good time and way, without requiring his people to compromise their testimony or to violate their consciences. In illustration take a glance at past history. How was slavery abolished? Every intelligent man knows that it was not by ballots. God overruled the insolence and aggressiveness of the slave power to effect its destruction. He who abolished slavery and secured the rights of man without ballots does not need your votes or mine to secure his own rights. We are to be witnesses for Christ and for his truth, to testify faithfully against the infidelity of the Constitution and the wickedness of the government, and to leave the consequences with God. In the words of the late Dr. A. M. Milligan: "It is not ours to inquire whether our rams'-horns trumpets will bring down the walls of Jericho or scatter the hosts of Midian, but to blow and shout and leave God to do his part in his own way. Some good honest Christians think it will not do to stand off and blow the trumpets, but they must help the Lord do his part and go and give the wall a push. Poor simple souls, the Lord does not need their help, and certainly he does not require us to violate his revealed will to bring about his secret purpose, to do evil that good may come."

Brethren, let us remain faithful to our position. Our platform is Scriptural, and it is safe. Moreover we are under solemn covenant obligation to stand fast on this platform. We have sworn to continue to refuse to incorporate with the government of the United States until a reformation has been effected. (See Covenant 1871, Sec. 3.) We should not go back or turn from God at all. Farther, we should do nothing to lay a stumbling block in the way of others. "It is good neither to eat flesh or drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak." Once more, we have received this testimony as a heritage from our fathers, shall we cease to maintain it? Never! unless first convinced that it is unscriptural. As yet the more I study it the more I am persuaded that it is the only safe and consistent position for Christians to take, hence I would say to all my brethren, hold fast notwithstanding the reproaches of men and rest assured that in the end, you shall not miss your reward. We may not live to see our testimony triumph or to see the government submitting to Jesus Christ, but if we are faithful unto death we shall receive the crown of life.

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